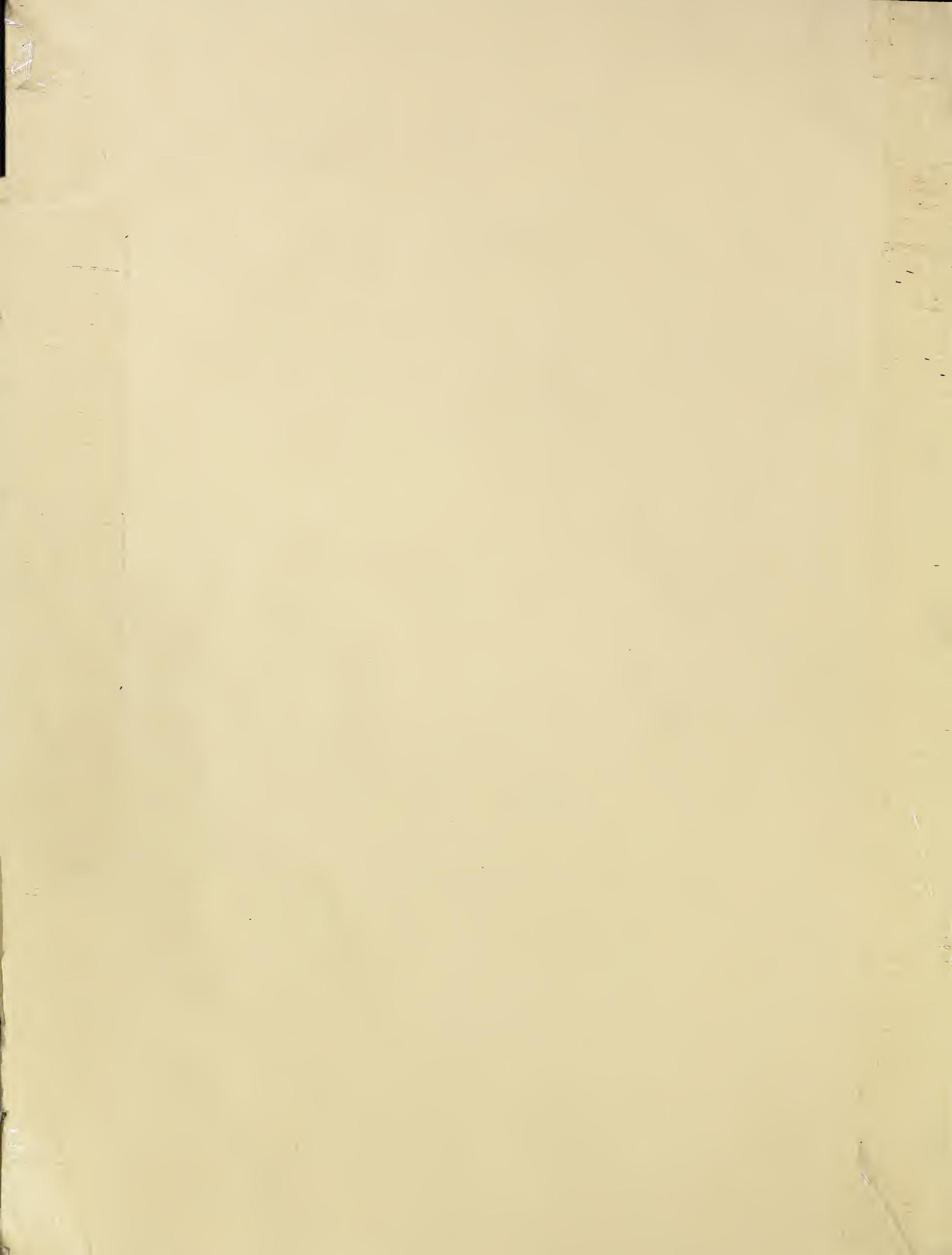


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September 1982

Food News for Consumers

United States Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service

USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service:

- Inspects and analyzes domestic and imported meat, poultry, and meat and poultry food products;
- Establishes standards and approves recipes and labels for processed meat and poultry products; and
- Monitors the meat and poultry industries for violations of inspection laws.

Food News for Consumers Subscriptions Now For Sale From GPO

This is the last issue of "Food News for Consumers" that will be mailed free to our 7,000 subscribers. Beginning with our next issue, subscriptions must be ordered through the Government Printing Office at \$7.00 for domestic subscribers and \$8.75 for foreign subscribers. Each subscription includes four issues per year. Policy changes and budgetary restrictions have caused this change in distribution.

Previously, only "information multipliers"--such as, food editors--were eligible to receive this free publication. Now, anyone who wishes to order the publication from the Government Printing Office may do so.

The order form on the back page of this issue may be used to subscribe to "Food News for Consumers." The next issue will be published in January.

USDA Testifies on Processed Products Inspection

In August, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture C.W. McMillan testified before Committees in both houses of Congress in support of a proposal to give the Secretary of Agriculture broader discretion in determining the intensity of inspection provided to individual meat, poultry and egg processing plants. The proposal would not affect slaughter inspection.

Under the law as it is now written, Federal inspection is normally provided on a daily, "continuous" basis in all processing establishments. With regard to meat and poultry inspection, this practice dates back to an interpretation of the 1906 Meat Inspection Act--enacted when processing operations were antiquated and the industry was neither as sophisticated nor as responsive as it is today.

"In many processing plants, daily inspection is not only unnecessary but is also a misuse of inspection resources," McMillan said. "We believe the proposal would improve the efficiency of the inspection of processed meat and poultry products without reducing effectiveness."

"A less-than-continuous system of inspection would allow USDA to take full advantage of the product monitoring systems developed by industry and to base inspection on the known ability and willingness of each firm to comply with the meat and poultry inspection regulations," he said.

The proposed changes in the Federal Meat Inspection Act, the Poultry Products Inspection Act and the Egg Products Inspection Act would adjust the frequency

USDA Testifies on Processed Products Inspection

Continued

of inspection based on: the nature and frequency of an establishment's processing operations, the adequacy and reliability of its product monitoring system, its history of compliance with inspection requirements and other factors USDA deems appropriate.

Copies of Assistant Secretary of Agriculture C.W. McMillan's statement before the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, Subcommittee on Agricultural Research and General Legislation on August 11, 1982, are available from FSIS.

Meat and Poultry Advisory Committee Meets

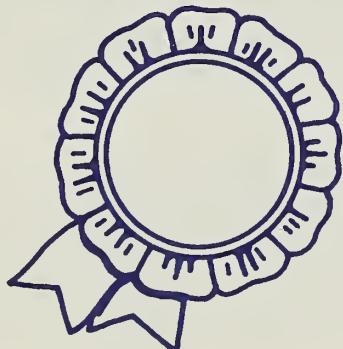


In July, USDA's Advisory Committee on Meat and Poultry Inspection met with FSIS officials in San Francisco. The committee advised the agency on current policy issues affecting FSIS, including food safety, sodium and product label approval.

The committee counsels FSIS on matters related to the meat and poultry inspection program. Its members represent scientific and public health organizations, federal and state government agencies, academic circles and various private interest and trade groups.

The committee is USDA's link with outside groups and represents a national geographic distribution, as well as a divergence of backgrounds and expertise. Press Release #847-82 (7-13-82).

Winners Announced in Second Annual Food Safety Poster Contest



In a special ceremony on June 21, Secretary of Agriculture John R. Block presented savings bonds and awards to the top winners of the second annual food safety poster contest.

The theme for this year's contest was "How to pack a safe brown bag or box lunch for school." An estimated 150,000 elementary school children from every state in the country competed to draw the best picture illustrating how to pack a safe homemade lunch.

The three top winners, who each received a \$100 U.S. Savings Bond, were Leonard Motolese, age 6, Allentown, Pa.; Maria Heinrihar, age 9, New Britain Conn.; and Karen Carstensen, age 10, Bellevue, Neb. Second and third prize winners received \$50 U.S. Savings Bonds. Press Release #509-82 (4-26-82).

Plans are underway for the third annual contest, and the theme will be health and safety information on product labels. Details on the contest will be announced in November.

How to Obtain Free Copies

Single free copies of press releases, Federal Register reprints, studies, fact sheets, and publications mentioned in the FSIS section of this newsletter are available from FSIS Public Awareness, Room 1163-S, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250. Phone: (202) 447-9351.

Where to Send Comments

Send your comments on proposals in the FSIS section to: Regulations Coordination Division, Room 2637-S, FSIS, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250. Usually two copies are requested. Be sure to identify the proposal you are commenting on by referring to the title of informal proposals or, for formal proposals, the date of publication in the Federal Register.

USDA Warns About Safe Cooking of Pork

USDA again warned consumers that live trichinae can survive rapid cooking methods, such as microwaving, unless all parts of the meat are cooked to 170 degrees F. The second warning came after USDA confirmed preliminary studies reported last year.

The research proves that microwave and other rapid cooking methods create a special problem because heat is not evenly distributed throughout foods. As a result, any trichinae parasites or bacteria present could survive in the "cold spots."

Tests showed that infective trichinae survived when pork chops from experimentally infected swine were cooked by microwave to a temperature of 170 degrees F. at the center point of the meat, and also when chops were partially cooked by microwave and further cooked by deep-fat frying to above 170 degrees F. The study, which was limited to pork chops, was conducted using industrial microwave ovens which are more powerful and cook somewhat faster than models sold for home use.

Trichinae are rarely found in pork--statistics show approximately one-tenth of one percent of the 80 million swine slaughtered annually are infected with the parasitic worms. Only about 100 to 120 cases of trichinosis in humans are reported annually, and many of the reported cases result from consumption of bear meat or from intentionally undercooked pork. Consumers and restaurateurs can be absolutely certain trichinae organisms are destroyed by cooking all fresh pork products to a consistent internal temperature of 170 degrees F., regardless of the cooking method used.

For more information: Press Release #417-82 (4-2-82); and backgrounder--Safe Cooking of Meat in Microwave Ovens (April 1982).

Residues of Pesticides Decline 60%



Less meat and poultry in the United States have pesticide residues than at any time in the past decade. Laboratory testing of meat and poultry samples by FSIS scientists has shown a 60 percent decline since 1973 in the appearance of chlorinated hydrocarbon pesticides--the same group of pesticides that includes DDT. FSIS attributes this decline to the gradual elimination of these chemicals from the environment through firm restrictions on their use. And this means a safer and more wholesome meat supply for the nation.

In most cases, these traces of pesticides fall below USDA's "tolerance" or "action" levels meaning they are so minute that they pose no health hazard to consumers. Any meat or poultry product with residues above the "tolerance" or "action" level is condemned and cannot be sold for human consumption. USDA has similar tolerance and action levels for animal drugs, such as sulfa.

By species, only 9 percent of slaughtered cattle show any trace of pesticide residues, down from 59 percent in 1973. Swine have dropped from 49 to 20 percent, and lambs from 67 to 20 percent. Most striking, the appearance of these pesticides in chickens has dropped from 96 to 3 percent. FSIS attributes the decline in chickens to the trend toward strictly controlling their environment on the farm.

Since 1967, FSIS has tested meat and poultry for pesticide and drug residues as part of its National Residue Program. The agency does this by taking samples from slaughter plants throughout the United States according to a computerized statistical plan. This allows FSIS scientists to determine the extent and levels of pesticides and residues in meat and poultry nationwide.

Last April FSIS began a new phase of the National Residue Program--the Total

**Residues of
Pesticides
Decline 60%**
Continued

Residue Avoidance Program (TRAP). TRAP is an education effort aimed at farmers to help them identify points in their production systems where contamination of livestock and poultry by drugs or pesticides could occur. Preventing residues, not reacting to them after the fact, is the goal of TRAP.

For further information see "FSIS Facts 'The National Residue Program'" and Press Release #504-82 (4-26-82).

**Mechanically
Separated
(Species)-An
Ingredient in
Some
Processed
Products**

Take a look at the ingredient statement on the label of a processed meat food product, like hotdogs, next time you're at the grocery store. It just might list "Mechanically Separated Beef" or "Mechanically Separated Pork" as one of the ingredients.

"Mechanically Separated (Species)" is made by specialized equipment that recovers the muscle tissue that remains on livestock carcasses (beef, pork, veal and lamb carcasses, for example) after they have been hand trimmed. Generally, carcass parts are broken up and pushed under high pressure through machinery with minute openings that allow a small amount of finely powdered bone to pass through, along with the meat and other soft tissue.

Because it contains bone, including bone marrow, and more of certain minerals, such as calcium, USDA concluded that mechanically separated product is different enough from "meat" that it should be identified by its own name and that its composition and use should be regulated separately.

USDA's requirements for mechanically separated product are based on extensive rulemakings in which health and safety questions, as well as product quality issues, were considered in detail. Among other things, the regulation limits the size of the bone particles and the bone solids content of mechanically separated product. Also, mechanically separated product can make up no more than 20% of the livestock product ingredients in a meat food product. The regulations also do not permit mechanically separated product to be used in baby, junior, or toddler foods or where its use would not be consistent with the basic characteristics--textural consistency, for example--expected of a particular meat food product.

Whenever a meat food product contains mechanically separated product, the name of the particular type used--for example, "Mechanically Separated Veal"-- must appear in the ingredient statement. In addition, the calcium content of a serving of the finished meat food product sometimes must be stated on the label. Calcium is an essential nutrient. However, a small group of Americans may have to restrict the amount of calcium in their diets for medical reasons. Therefore, this information is provided where appropriate for use in planning restricted diets.

Mechanically separated product may be used as one of the ingredients in franks, bologna, whole hog sausage, luncheon meats, stews, chili con carne, beef with barbecue sauce and a number of other processed meat food products.

For more information: Press Release #793-82 (6-21-82) and backgrounder-- Mechanically Separated Meat (June 1982).

**USDA Gives
Tips on
Freezing Meat
and Poultry**

If frozen meat and poultry accidentally thaws, can it be refrozen? Can you freeze food that has been cooked?

In the case of a power failure, frozen meat and poultry that still have ice

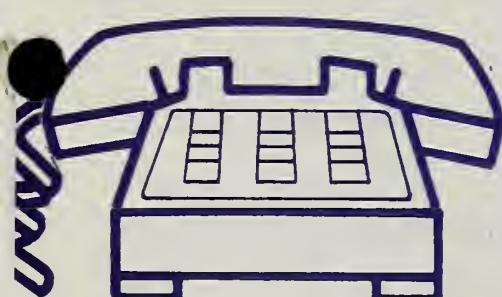
crystals present, or have stayed at 40 degrees Fahrenheit or lower for less than two days, can be safely refrozen. Some eating quality may be lost, but the products should remain nutritious and safe to eat. Refrozen meat and poultry should be used quickly.

However, thawed meat and poultry which has an off-odor or off-color should not be refrozen or eaten. If the odor or color of any meat or poultry product--or any food for that matter--is questionable, do not taste it. Throw it out!

As for leftovers, you can freeze cooked meats and poultry, but the texture and overall quality of the food may be affected. These leftovers should not be frozen a second time. Also, use them as soon as possible to ensure that they remain safe and wholesome.

For further information: FSIS fact sheet--Safe Handling Tips for Meat and Poultry and Food Safety for the Family.

**USDA
Streamlines
Consumer
Response
System**



Consumers with questions about meat and poultry products now will find it easier to get answers through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's expanded consumer response system.

The new central system eliminates unnecessary duplication and delay in responding to consumer inquiries. Instead of having to call or write several different places with their concerns about food safety, consumers can now get answers by contacting one central source--either by writing Food Safety Consumer Inquiries, Room 1163-S, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250, or by calling (202) 472-4485.

Examples of inquiries that consumers can quickly get answers to include questions about the wholesomeness, quality or labeling of products containing meat or poultry; questions about the proper temperature for cooking and storing meat and poultry; or questions about safe storage times for these products. Requests for consumer publications about food safety can also be filled through the new system. Press Release #602-82 (5-13-82).

**Smoked Ham
Recalled**

Last August, at least 100 people became ill in four separate incidents from eating "deli-style" smoked ham catered by the James Stratigos Catering Service. After discovering that the product was contaminated by staphylococcus, a food poisoning organism, USDA initiated a recall of some 36,000 pounds of "deli-style" smoked ham in five states. These states included western Connecticut; eastern Maryland; southern New York; southwestern Pennsylvania and northern Virginia. The hams were produced by Fred Weinkauff, Inc., Brooklyn, N.Y., and marketed under the "Old Dominion," "Knickerbocker," "Ridgewood" and "Red Bee" brand names. Weinkauff sold the 13-pound cooked and smoked hams wholesale to delicatessens, supermarket deli counters, restaurants, caterers and similar outlets. Consumers who recently purchased smoked, ripple-edged ham should check with retail outlets to find out if the product was processed by Weinkauff. If so, they should return the product to the retailer.

**Other FSIS
News**

USDA extends comment period for margarine standard. Press Release #398-81 (3-30-82).

Other FSIS News
Continued

- USDA revises system for collecting animal disease data. Press Release #380-82 (3-30-82).
- USDA announces new position to oversee meat and poultry imports and exports. Press Release #418-82 (4-2-82).
- USDA seeks information from public about barbecue standard. Press Release #433-82 (4-6-82).
- USDA adopts simplified selling, transporting and marking requirements. Press Release #511-82 (4-23-82).
- USDA resumes accepting meat from Costa Rica. Press Release #569-82 (5-6-82).
- USDA proposes changes in regulations on cleanup time. Press Release #581-82 (5-7-82).
- New system proposed for approval of meat and poultry labels. Press Release #651-82 (5-24-82).
- USDA adopts final procedures to modernize poultry inspection. Press Release #683-82 (5-28-82).
- Easier approval for additives to meat and poultry proposed. Press Release #689-82 (6-1-82).
- "Sodium--think about it..." Feature #710-82 (6-7-82).
- USDA permits whey and whey products in some foods. Press Release #758-82 (6-21-82).
- USDA adopts new meat export certificate. Press Release #826-82 (7-7-82).
- USDA extends comment period for proposed changes on cleanup time. Press Release #825-82 (7-7-82).
- USDA proposal would clarify and expand imported meat requirements. Press Release #832-82 (7-8-82).
- USDA adopts final rules for listing official establishment numbers. Press Release #833-82 (7-8-82).

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service administers:

- The food stamp program;
- The national school lunch and school breakfast programs;
- The special supplemental food program for women, infants, and children (WIC); and
- The food distribution, child care food, summer food service and special milk programs.

USDA Proposes Using New Vegetable Protein Products

USDA has proposed adding several new types of vegetable protein products to satisfy part of the meat or meat alternate requirement in child nutrition programs. The nutritional value of the vegetable protein products would be equivalent to that of the meat, fish or poultry they supplement.

The department feels that this proposal would provide added flexibility in the use of vegetable protein products by responding to advances and changes in food technology.

Vegetable protein products are food additives made from vegetables, such as soybeans, that increase the protein value of foods.

USDA Adjusts Income Guidelines for Food Stamps



On July 1 USDA increased the income eligibility limits for the food stamp program 10 percent. The new adjustment means the monthly gross income limit for a family of four increased from \$916 to \$1,008.

Currently, 22.7 million people receive food stamp benefits. Income limits of the food stamp program, which vary by household size, are 30 percent above the Office of Management and Budget's poverty line. USDA does not expect the 10 percent adjustment to significantly increase the number of people participating in the program. An adjustment is made each year to reflect the increase in the cost of living.

Last October, eligibility for the food stamp program was based on an applicant's net income after certain deductions. However, the 1981 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act changed the law to require that eligibility for all applicants, except the elderly and disabled, be based on gross income rather than net income.

USDA to Test Non-Fat Dry Milk Distribution to Needy Families

USDA plans to distribute 11 million pounds of non-fat dry milk to approximately 450,000 needy families in Florida, Minnesota and Washington. The milk, which is equivalent to nearly 13.8 million gallons of fluid milk and valued at nearly \$12 million, will be distributed through non-profit organizations.

The three-month demonstration project, to begin in September, is patterned after the successful cheese distribution program now underway nationwide. According to USDA officials, the project is an effort to decrease the massive dairy stocks acquired under the dairy price support program.

Surplus Cheese and Butter given to Needy

As of July, USDA has made available 220 million pounds of surplus cheese to states for distribution to needy people. States have ordered 117 million pounds of the cheese and have distributed 83 million pounds through charity groups.

In August the department began a similar program to give away 50 million pounds of surplus butter. Over 10 million pounds of butter have been ordered by states so far, of which 60 thousand pounds have been distributed.

Food Donated to Schools

USDA donates a variety of foods to schools to meet some of the nutritional needs of children who participate in the school lunch program. School lunch programs have served as constructive outlets for the surplus foods USDA buys to help stabilize farm prices. Simultaneously, the surplus foods reduce school meal costs while meeting the nutrition objectives of schools.

This past year, schools were offered all they could use of dry milk, butter, cheese and bonus quantities of turkeys, turkey roasts, honey and fruit products. The bonus commodities and regular donations gave schools 20 cents worth of federal commodities for every lunch served.

School Lunch Program Applications Revised

Beginning this school year, parents must include their social security numbers on students' applications for free or reduced-cost meals at school. This rule will help eliminate abuses in the school lunch program that can occur if parents do not report their total incomes. Previously, applications required only information on family size and income.

USDA's Agricultural Research Service:

- *Conducts research to fulfill the diverse needs of agricultural users—from farmers to consumers—in the areas of:*
- *Crop and animal production, protection, processing, and distribution;*
- *Food safety and quality; and*
- *Natural resources conservation.*

Peanuts Now a Drink

Agricultural Research Service engineers have invented a process that turns flour from raw peanuts into a milk-like powder that can be mixed with water and vanilla to make a vanilla-flavored drink. The drink is white in color and is said to have a pleasant taste.

Presently, the drink is not sold commercially. However, it is an example of how new uses for well-known crops can supply nutrients to people in developing countries.

Peanuts on their way to liquid drink undergo heating, blanching and partial oil extraction. Then, they are ground, mixed with water, heated again and pasteurized. When cooled, the drink can be refrigerated for up to eight days.

For more information, contact: Agricultural Research Service, Food Products Research, USDA, New Orleans, LA 70179.

USDA's Economic Research Service:

- *Analyzes international activities of agricultural significance;*
- *Does research on commodities, food and nutrition, natural resources, and rural development; and*
- *Furnishes timely and objective economic and statistical information to farmers, other rural Americans, industries, consumers, and policy-makers.*

Coupon Use Among Shoppers Swells

To shoppers, coupons offer a chance to snip nickels and dimes off prices. But, to the U.S. food industry, coupon advertising is a billion dollar a year effort to capture customers.

Ninety billion food advertising coupons were issued in 1980. One out of 20 of those were redeemed at a total value of about \$1 billion. About 3.3 cents of every \$10 spent by the consumer goes to cover the gross cost of coupons. However, there is no hard evidence that food prices would drop in the absence of coupons, because manufacturers would shift to other types of advertising.

While consumers can save money, food manufacturers find that coupon costs--average face value of 23.5 cents, plus 8.5 cents in handling expenses in 1980--are more than offset by increased sales volume. Coupons help boost sales by lowering the retail cost for the item, increasing consumer awareness of the product and improving shelf space and position in stores.

How Does Advertising Affect Food Spending?

It's no secret that brand advertising usually increases sales for that particular brand. But, USDA research indicates that sales for all brands in the same class may increase when manufacturers of any of the brands advertise.

Breakfast cereals are a good example. Economic Research Service data suggest that when any cereal manufacturer advertises, sales for all cereal brands may increase. But in the long run, advertising also has a cumulative impact on consumer purchases.

Product classes that are heavily advertised by brand manufacturers generally get a bigger share of the consumer dollar than less heavily promoted product classes. But, ERS data indicate that advertising may only cause a shift in foods Americans eat--almost never has it caused the total amount of foods eaten to increase.

Advertising and promotion have two main impacts. They increase consumer food costs by about 4 cents out of every dollar spent. These costs are partially offset by benefits to users of commercial radio and television programs, publications, incentive premiums, and cents-off coupons. The greater potential significance, however, is advertising's influence on food consumption patterns.

This is because, within budget constraints, consumers must first decide how to allocate their income between food and nonfood expenditures; then, between food at-home and food away-from-home; then, among the types of foods (dairy products versus meat versus produce, and so on); and finally, among the brands of specific foods. In this way, advertising has three distinct possible effects on food consumption patterns: the specific brands of food, the types of food and the total amount of food purchased.

USDA's Human Nutrition Information Service:

- Maintains USDA's Nutrient Data Bank;
- Conducts the Nationwide Food Consumption Survey;
- Monitors nutrient content of the U.S. food supply;
- Provides nutrition guidelines for education and action programs;
- Collects and disseminates food and nutrition materials; and
- Conducts nutrition education research.

Best Meat Protein Buys Unchanged

Due to rising prices, consumers want to get more for their food dollars. And one place to start is in purchasing meat, poultry or fish. In Washington, D.C., last June the best buys for shoppers of 20 types and cuts of meat, poultry or fish were beef liver, turkey, chicken, whole ham, ground beef and pork shoulders. These same items were the best buys in a similar study in February.

Prices ranged from about 25 to 50 cents for 3-ounce servings of the best buys to \$1 to \$2 for a serving of round or sirloin beefsteak, center cut pork chops or rib roast of beef. Loin lamb chops and porterhouse beefsteak cost even more. The best protein buys for all types of foods were dry beans, eggs, beef liver, turkey, chicken and peanut butter.

The costs for the selected meats and other foods were based on Washington, D.C., prices for 20 grams of protein, which provides about one-third the recommended daily allowance for a young man.

Best Meat Protein Buys Unchanged

Continued

For more information on these costs or to figure the costs of comparable items in local areas, write: Consumer Nutrition Center, HNIS, Room 325-A, Hyattsville, MD 20782.

School Lunches Make Major Contribution to Diet



Students participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) received 31 to 43 percent of their recommended nutrient intake for the day from lunch, compared with 17 to 26 percent for students not participating in the program. At meals other than lunch and snacks, however, nonparticipants consumed more food energy and more of all nutrients studied, except vitamin-A, than NSLP participants.

Taking into account all three daily meals and snacks, the NSLP students met recommended nutrient levels for protein, phosphorus, vitamin-A, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, vitamin-B12 and vitamin-C. But, their intakes were below recommended levels for iron, magnesium and vitamin-B6. This data was from the Nationwide Food Consumption Survey, 1977-78.

For a copy of the report, "The National School Lunch Program and Diets of Participants, March 1982," write the Consumer Nutrition Center, Human Nutrition Information Service, USDA, Hyattsville, MD 20782.

USDA Releases Family Food Costs

In July, a family of four--a husband, wife and children between ages 6 and 11--spent \$59.00 a week for a thrifty food plan, \$75.80 for a low-cost plan, \$95.00 for a moderate-cost plan and \$113.60 for a liberal plan.

Each food plan contains enough food to provide nutritious diets for family members. In estimating costs, USDA assumes that food for all meals and snacks is purchased at the store and prepared at home.

Each month, the Human Nutrition Information Service releases costs of foods for families of different sizes. Educators, lawyers and administrators use these figures as standards for reasonable amounts to spend for foods. The cost of food in the thrifty plan is used in setting the coupon allotment for the Food Stamp Program.

The publication, "Family Food Budgeting for Good Meals and Good Nutrition," HG-94, describes the food plans on which the costs are based. Copies are available for \$2.50 from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

Food Consumption in Puerto Rico Studied by USDA

A recently completed food consumption survey of about 3,000 households in Puerto Rico found that households there used 14 percent more milk and milk products and 70 percent more grain products per person than households on the U.S. mainland.

On the other hand, mainland households used more meat, fruit and alcoholic beverages than those in Puerto Rico.

The survey showed the average nutrient levels in most households in Puerto Rico met Recommended Daily Allowances (RDA). However, the levels for some population subgroups did not. For example, average calcium levels for large

households fell short of recommended levels. Only 62 percent of the households met the RDA for vitamin-A during the week studied, 73 percent for vitamin-B6 and 75 percent for calcium.

The study, "Food Consumption and Dietary Levels of Households in Puerto Rico, Summer and Fall 1977," is available in limited supply from: Consumer Nutrition Center, HNIS, Hyattsville, MD 20782.

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service:

- Gathers and disseminates current information on prices, supplies, and other market data;
 - Provides cotton and tobacco standardization, inspection, grading, and testing services on request;
 - Administers several regulatory programs designed to protect producers, handlers, and consumers from careless, deceptive, or fraudulent marketing practices;
 - Administers marketing agreement and other programs to help establish and maintain the orderly marketing of milk, fruits, and vegetables;
 - Provides patent protection to developers of certain novel plant varieties;
 - Monitors industry-sponsored and financed research and promotion programs;
 - Inspects and analyzes liquid, dried, and frozen egg products;
 - Establishes grade standards for fruits, vegetables, meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products, and provides grading services for these foods on request; and
 - Buys food for the USDA school lunch program and other food assistance programs.
-

Milk Now for Pantry Shelf, Not Refrigerator



Consumers in the United States soon may be able to go into their local stores and pick up "aseptically" packaged milk products that can be stored in their pantries for at least three months without refrigeration. To use the product, they just cool it in the refrigerator and a palatable product nearly equivalent to fresh milk results.

Aseptic milk, also called sterile or ultra high temperature (UHT) milk, is made by processing milk at ultra high temperatures for a very short time and then packaging it in special protective containers. The heat treatment process destroys most of the bacteria that commonly cause dairy products to sour. The special aseptic packages preserve the milk. This processing and special packaging, however, make the product more expensive.

A need exists for such products in many parts of the world where refrigeration is limited or where milk is not produced locally. In some European countries where home refrigeration is limited, aseptic milk has been available for many years. It is now available in the United States--in Minnesota and several other areas of the country. A few domestic plants--in Georgia, Washington, California and another being built in Utah--are making aseptic milk and looking to export markets.

Since most Americans are accustomed to fresh, cold milk right out of the refrigerated dairy case, the question of whether consumers here will accept the product remains unanswered.

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